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Social representations and community attitudes towards spring breakers

Abstract

Social representations theory has been adopted for explaining tourism impacts and local attitudes. However, its usefulness in segmenting local population in terms of their attitudes towards specific types of tourists has not been tested. This study identifies the attitudes of local people towards spring break, a North American young tourist phenomenon in the context of the Mexican beach resort of Acapulco. Although residents perceive an increase in alcohol consumption, drug use, noise and litter during the spring break season, they largely recognise economic benefits and are thus generally supportive for the phenomenon. Based on these attitudes, three clusters were identified: *spring break supporters* (identified by their high appreciation of spring break benefits), *ambivalents* (who are uncertain about both benefits and costs) and *realistics* (characterised by recognising both benefits and costs). The main contribution of this study lies in the confirmation of the usefulness of social representations theory in explaining residents' attitudes towards a very specific type of tourists whose hedonist behaviours are a common characteristic.

Keywords: spring break; social representations; community attitudes; tourism impacts; Mexico; segmentation

INTRODUCTION

Literature reviews suggest that there is a lack of a universal definition of attitude (Ajzen, 2005). However, Getz (1994) argues that attitudes may be defined as enduring predispositions towards a specific aspect of the individual's environment. Such enduring predispositions may reflect in the way individuals think, feel and behave towards a specific entity of reality. Thus, attitudes are structured by three components: cognitive (beliefs), affective (emotional) and conative (implicit behaviours) (McDougall & Munro, 1994).

The importance of studying attitudes lies in the common assumption that attitudes are predictors of both favourable and unfavourable behaviour. It is frequently considered that an individual who holds a favourable attitude will perform favourable behaviours and those who hold unfavourable attitudes will perform unfavourable behaviours. Yet, this assumption seems simplistic as it should be recognised that attitude is only one of several factors that determine behaviour. As Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) argue, an individual's attitude toward an object influences the overall pattern of his responses to the object but it does not necessarily predict any given behaviour. Other factors determining behaviour, for example, can be values and situational factors (McDougall & Munro, 1994). Regardless of their influence on behaviour, however, attitudes should be measured in order to gain an understanding of the reasons why people behave the way they do.

The study of attitudes within tourism has been largely framed within the studies on local community attitudes towards the sociocultural impacts of tourism. There is a growing number of studies looking at the attitudes and perceptions of locals towards tourism. In his study of community groups' perceptions of and preferences to tourism development, Andriotis (2005) found 88 attitudinal studies having used as a sample unit residents, very few though have analysed such attitudes towards specific forms of tourism.

A specific type of tourism in which local attitudes have not been analysed is youth tourism. Particularly, Spring Break, a North American tourism phenomenon, in which the behaviour of

travellers may be in frequent contrast with local norms and values, has not been incorporated into the analysis of tourism impacts and residents' attitudes. This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of local attitudes towards the social impacts of specific youth tourism type, spring break. At the same time, it aims to support the value of social representations theory for the study of community attitudes towards spring break social impacts and behaviour. While social representations has been useful in previous studies on tourism attitudes (see for example Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross, 1996), it is noted that the potential value for understanding local attitudes, which may be considerably shaped by cultural and behavioural gaps between local and youth tourism forms such as spring breakers, has not been evidenced.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impacts of tourism

The consideration of local attitudes has been relevant in identifying the impacts - predominantly social- of tourism development (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993; Getz, 1994; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004; Lankford, 1994; Lepp, 2007; Long, Perdue, & Allen, 1990; McCool & Martin, 1994; Teye, Sönmez, & Sirakaya, 2002; Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006). Tourism social impacts may be defined as 'the changes in the quality of life of residents of tourism destinations that are a consequence of any kind in that destination' (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 227). While it is hard, if not impossible, to identify which changes are an exclusive consequence of tourism and which of other economic and social phenomena, tourism has commonly been related to specific components of the social dimension of destination communities.

When referring to the social impacts of tourism, it should be borne in mind that such impacts will be significantly shaped by the specific type of tourism development, as well as tourists' behaviour in the destination. It is reasonable to suggest that specific types of tourism will generate specific impacts on local communities. Nevertheless, it is evident that very few studies have focused on the attitudes of local people towards youth tourism and their behaviour. Analysing the attitudes of local people towards young travellers is relevant not only because it is a growing niche market (Carr, 1998) but also and perhaps most importantly, because of the 'extreme' behaviour adopted by specific groups of young travellers. Such behaviour may result in binge drinking, drug use, sexual promiscuity and other risk taking activities (Carr, 2002), as has been found in the case of young British travelling to Greek resorts (Andriotis, 2010) or spring breakers to Mexican and Caribbean destinations (Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, & Smeaton, 1998). The study of local attitudes towards certain youth groups, their behaviour and impacts is thus important since their behaviour may result in activities that may contrast with local norms and values, leading possibly to negative attitudes towards tourism. As Pearce (2005) argues, "[t]hese hedonistic and indulgent encounters sometimes raise important management challenges for the communities visited, including protection of the participants and the control of drug use, aggression and the consequences of sexual promiscuity" (pp. 29-30).

Community attitudes and social representations

Local attitudes may be described as community's group of beliefs, knowledge, feelings of like or dislike, and the behaviour (or the intention of) towards tourism development. Local attitudes may be towards several aspects of tourism including impacts (Allen et al., 1988), planning and development (Andriotis, 2001; Keogh, 1990), the tourists themselves, their behaviour and any other tangible or intangible manifestation of tourism activity within their local environment (Andriotis, 2010). Examining the attitudes of destination communities is helpful in identifying specific segments of support for or rejection of tourism within the same community; and therefore, has become relevant for destination planning and management purposes (Harrill, 2004, p. 256).

Although many studies on community attitudes may have an exploratory and descriptive nature, few investigations have attempted to understand and explain the nature of residents'

attitudes towards tourism through theoretical bases. Specifically, the social exchange theory and the social representations theory have been adopted in order to understand the nature of local attitudes and perceptions towards tourism. The social exchange theory, in the tourism context, assumes that social relations involve an exchange of resource among social actors; the primary motive for initiating exchange from the residents' perspective is to improve the community's social and economic well-being; and residents' perceptions and attitudes are predictors of their behaviour towards tourism (Ap, 1992). The social representations theory aims "to elucidate the social process involved in the everyday, active construction of the world by participants, and to show how attitudes, beliefs and attributions are formed in terms of these socially derived frameworks (Potter & Litton, 1985, p. 81). In the context of tourism, the social representations theory "suggests that residents have representations of tourism which underpin their perceptions of impact, and these representations are informed by direct experiences, social interaction and other information sources such as the media" (Fredline, 2006, p. 139).

While the social exchange theory has been proved useful in the empirical study of tourism attitudes (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Ap, 1992; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990), the social representations theory, although not explaining why a particular perception is held (Sharpley, 2014), remains a widely unexplored option for explaining social conflict or reactions to certain relevant issues of tourism in host communities. Social representations can be defined as the 'concepts, statements and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter-individual communications' (Moscovici, 1981, as cited in Pearce et al., 1996, p. 31). As a theory, social representations take an emic, contextual and process-oriented perspective to understand the reality of the social actor; they help to define reality, are critical components of group and individual identity and therefore can direct both action and thought.

In the context of community attitudes towards tourism development, and tourists' behaviour and impacts, social representations may provide potential insight. Since social representations framework direct attention to systems of benefits, values, attributes and explanations which individuals and groups hold about tourism (Pearce et al., 1996), it may help explain how local people understand and react collectively to tourism impacts and to the behaviour of specific groups of tourists.

The study of Fredline and Faulkner (2000) adopted social representations theory to analyse host community reactions to the impacts of the Gold Coast IndyCar Race in Australia. By recognising that the key to identifying social representations within a community is to identify commonality or consensus of residents' perceptions, the authors identified five clusters within their study; *Cautious Romantics*, *Haters*, *Realists*, *Lovers*, and *Concerned for a Reason*. The authors concluded that based on social representations theory, a better understanding on the complexities of community representations and the role of social networks in their development can be gained. Later on, Andriotis and Vaughan (2003), when identifying and explaining the attitudes of urban residents towards tourism development in Crete, Greece, stated that the development of individual and collective attitudes and perceptions towards tourism may successfully be studied by examining the social representations. Therefore, the authors adopted social representations theory and identified three clusters namely; *Advocates*, *Socially and Environmentally Concerned* and *Economic Skeptics*.

While existing studies demonstrate that social representations theory is useful for understanding local attitudes towards tourism, it should be noted that past research has been focused on tourism development as a whole, and very rarely, if ever, has this theoretical approach been tested in residents' attitudes towards specific types of tourists, particularly on whether their behaviour may actually play an important role in shaping residents' perceptions, emotions and behaviours towards tourists.

Spring breakers

Spring break is a travel phenomenon consisting of thousands of North American College students travelling to beach resorts in the United States, the Caribbean and Mexico (late February to early April). Although North American destinations such as Daytona Beach and Fort Lauderdale in Florida, and South Padre Island and Palm Springs in Texas and California, respectively, have been popular among spring breakers for decades, the phenomenon is now present in several beach resorts of Mexico.

The phenomenon of spring break has been recognised for the fact that spring breakers adopt 'excessive' behaviour during their stay in destinations. The behaviour of students during spring break travel has been studied during the last three decades. A clear and relevant piece of work is that of Josiam, et al. (1998), which focused on the analysis of the sexual, alcohol and drug related behavioural patterns of spring break travel. The work of Smeaton, Josiam, & Dietrich (1998) on alcohol consumption and binge drinking during spring break, and more recent studies such as that of Apostolopoulos, Sönmez, & Yu (2002) and Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, Yu, Yang, Mattila, & Yu (2006) which revealed that the behaviours of students during spring break are commonly extreme in terms of binge drinking, drug taking and sexual activity.

THE SETTING

Mexico has been identified as a popular destination for spring break travel within North American students. Since the 1990s, over 50% of American students visit Mexico for spring break (Hobson & Josiam, 1992). According to the Consulate General of the United States, over 100,000 American teenagers and young adults travel to Mexican destinations over spring break each year (US Consulate, 2013). Among the nine beach resorts popular to spring breakers in Mexico, Cancun and Acapulco are listed as top destinations. Although Cancun receives the great majority of students during spring break, Acapulco, situated on the South Pacific, has become one of the most important spring break destinations in Mexico due to its tourism image. In particular, the number of beaches, leisure activities and its legendary night life has become popular features of the destination.

Although Acapulco has been very popular among spring breakers, the number of spring break arrivals has experienced a considerable decrease in the last two years. According to figures obtained directly from personal communication with the local government during the fieldwork of this study, 15,000 spring breakers visited Acapulco in 2008; 12,000 in 2009; and 6,000 in 2010. The noticeable decrease may be related to the travel warnings issued by the U.S. government to inform its citizens about the security situation in Mexico. At a national level though the number of spring breakers visiting Mexico was in 2012 almost 77 thousand (SECTUR, 2012).

Due to the number of arrivals, the economic contribution of spring breakers to the economy of Acapulco is allegedly very significant. This is because spring break travellers account for the greatest portion of international tourists during the spring break season in the destination (Pacheco, 2009). However, according to the national press (Juárez, 2009), although the number of spring break students visiting Acapulco is large, the economic benefit of such a market is questionable. The main reason for this is because a large number of the travel and accommodation services purchased are those offered by North American tour operators and thus a large proportion of the financial benefits remain in the country of origin. Moreover, the limited economic benefit in Acapulco is further reduced by the fact that most students stay in four specific hotels in the destination. This is not surprising because only very few hotels in Acapulco are advertised on popular spring break websites (see for example www.mexicospringbreak.com and www.springbreak.com).

In addition to the alleged limited extended economic benefit of spring break in Acapulco, the behaviour of spring breakers in the destination and its implications as related to community attitudes have not been revised. As in other spring break destinations, the excessive alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behaviour have been identified as a specific characteristic of

spring breakers' behaviour in Acapulco (Monterrubio & Equihua, 2011). In this vein, despite the economic and social relevance that the spring break phenomenon holds for Acapulco, it must be noted that spring break's impacts and derived local residents' attitudes have been largely ignored.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to identify local attitudes towards spring break and their behaviour in Acapulco, Mexico. The study is an extension of a first study conducted in 2010 looking at the behaviour of spring breakers in the same destination (Monterrubio & Equihua, 2011), largely based on the survey instrument designed by Josiam, et al. (1998). Based on the survey method, the design of a 5-point Likert-scale instrument was widely based on a detailed literature review on local community attitudes towards tourism and informed by the findings obtained during the first study. A pilot study was administered to forty local residents in the destination to test the functionality of the instrument.

The instrument was then amended and extended. Based on the need to incorporate those social impact indicators mentioned by informants during the pilot study, not previously identified by past research, the final version of the instrument consisted of 38 items. It was administered to a sample of 157 residents of Acapulco during June and July 2011. Data were collected in the Golden Zone (Zona Dorada) of the destination, where most of the spring breakers stayed in that year. A convenience sampling technique was adopted; the sample size was largely defined by the availability of informants, their will to participate and the time and economic resources available for the project. Informants were mainly approached across the main avenue and the beach during the daytime both on weekends and weekdays; some of them were working (e.g. hotel and restaurant employees, business owners, taxi drivers, vendors), others were surveyed at their home; and others were met on the street. The response rate (over 80%) was considerably high as very few people refused to participate. Although there was not a strictly random procedure for the selection of informants, special attention was paid to incorporate residents with various profiles in terms of age, place of birth, residence length and economic dependence on spring break.

SPSS 19.0 was used for data management and univariate analysis (frequency distributions, percentages as well as standard deviations and means). With the intention to identify social representations in the population studied, a K-means cluster analysis was undertaken instead of the hierarchical method, because it was more appropriate for the sample size. The major problem with cluster analysis is that there is no definite procedure for identifying the number of clusters (Ryan, 1995). To approach this problem the distances between clusters were investigated. According to Hair et al. (1987) researchers should stop "when this distance exceeds a specified value or when the successive distances between groups make a sudden jump" (p. 306). This is easier through the use of an icicle plot or a dendrogram. To select the best number of clusters, solutions were computed for several numbers of clusters from two to six. The best alternative, after an evaluation of all solutions, was considered to be three clusters for the following reasons: a) at a three clusters solution the sizes of the clusters were more equal (41, 65, and 51), whereas, for example, in a four clusters solution the sizes were more unequal; b) the distance between the clusters was too high for most of the other solutions; and c) the findings were more manageable and better to communicate with a three cluster solution than a solution with more or less clusters.

To test the reliability of the scale Cronbach α was calculated. The value of Cronbach α was .737, showing satisfactory internal consistency reliability of the scale. Once clusters were identified, their key characteristics were examined and they were named by comparing the mean scores of the responses and the ratings on the Likert scale for each question. In order to pinpoint the differences in data composition among the clusters, ANOVA tests were carried out. The ANOVA tests showed significance for all 30 items. However, the F-tests should be used only for descriptive purposes and not to test the hypothesis that the cluster means are equal because the clusters have been chosen to maximise the differences among cases in different clusters. The level of probability for rejecting the null hypothesis that the independent and dependent variables were not related was .05 for all tests.

FINDINGS

Respondents' profile

With regard to informants' profile, 57% were males, and the mean age was 37 years old. On average, informants had resided for 31 years in Acapulco and most of them (68%) were native. Approximately 60% reported having more than 50% of their income from tourism as a whole, and only 35% indicated having a direct economic income of more than 50% from spring break (see Table 1).

Table 1: Informants' sociodemographics

| | <i>n</i> | % | Mean |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----|------|
| Gender | | | |
| Male | 89 | 57 | |
| Female | 68 | 43 | |
| Place of birth | | | |
| Acapulco | 106 | 68 | |
| Another place of the state | 29 | 18 | |
| Another state | 22 | 14 | |
| Length of residence | | | 31 |
| Age | | | 37 |
| Economic income from tourism | | | |
| 76% to 100% | 46 | 29 | |
| 51% to 75% | 48 | 31 | |
| Less than 50% | 50 | 32 | |
| None | 13 | 8 | |
| Economic income from spring break | | | |
| 76% to 100% | 19 | 12 | |
| 51% to 75% | 36 | 23 | |
| Less than 50% | 50 | 32 | |

Overall responses to tourism impacts

Spring break's impacts were mainly assessed through their perceived benefits and costs. With regard to the benefits, indicators were defined in terms of the spring break related changes in employment, economic benefit, trade opportunities, public services and, cultural exchange. Through this, it was pursued to identify which of these factors had increased or diminished as a consequence of spring break in the destination.

In terms of the perceived benefits, the study revealed that five main benefits as related to spring break are perceived by local residents in Acapulco (see Table 2). In order of importance, spring break's benefits include: destination promotion ($M=1.7$), employment generation ($M=1.9$), increase of commercial activity ($M=2.1$), improvement of local economy during low season ($M=2.2$), and increase of the sale of handcrafts and souvenirs ($M=2.5$). Some of these effects strongly concur with the perceived benefits previously identified in the context of tourism in general. For example, employment generation and improvement of local economy have been perceived as a tourism benefit in Turkey (Tosun, 2002), Hungary (Rátz, 2000) and the UK (Haley, Snaith, & Miller, 2005). Rather than a specific benefit belonging exclusively to spring break, the economic benefit may be due to the general economic dimension that spring break as a tourism type can have. Regarding the benefit that spring break has on the image of the destination, it may be related to the large advertisement of Acapulco, mainly in the USA, as a top destination in Mexico, as it is evidenced in student travel agencies such as Student Travel Services.

Table 2: Overall responses to spring break's social impact and attitudinal statements (in percentages)

| Statement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | M | SD |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Employment increases due to spring breakers | 34 | 51 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 1.96 | 1.03 |
| 2. Spring break economic benefit is just for some people | 32 | 40 | 6 | 15 | 7 | 2.26 | 1.57 |
| 3. Springbreak favours local economy in low season | 34 | 37 | 8 | 14 | 7 | 2.24 | 1.58 |
| 4. Springbreaks increases local trade opportunities | 36 | 37 | 10 | 12 | 5 | 2.14 | 1.39 |
| 5. Springbreak has improved public services | 4 | 23 | 12 | 37 | 24 | 3.54 | 1.47 |
| 6. Springbreak favours tourism promotion of Acapulco | 55 | 32 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 1.72 | 1.13 |
| 7. Springbreak enhances local traditions of Acapulco | 17 | 21 | 20 | 24 | 18 | 3.06 | 1.86 |
| 8. Springbreak helps to preserve typical food | 7 | 34 | 13 | 31 | 15 | 3.12 | 1.52 |
| 9. Springbreak benefits the sale of handcrafts | 29 | 30 | 13 | 20 | 8 | 2.48 | 1.73 |
| 10. Springbreak enhances cultural exchange with locals | 17 | 29 | 16 | 24 | 14 | 2.88 | 1.77 |
| 11. The price of goods and services increases during spring break period | 27 | 25 | 8 | 34 | 6 | 2.66 | 1.82 |
| 12. Alcohol consumption increases in the community during spring break period | 52 | 26 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 1.94 | 1.46 |
| 13. Crime increases in the community during spring break period | 6 | 19 | 13 | 44 | 18 | 3.49 | 1.34 |
| 14. Prostitution increases in the community during spring break season | 13 | 24 | 15 | 31 | 17 | 3.16 | 1.74 |
| 15. Sale and use of drugs increase in the community during spring break period | 31 | 24 | 23 | 15 | 7 | 2.43 | 1.61 |
| 16. Spring break increases the number of people in public spaces | 47 | 40 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 1.78 | 0.92 |
| 17. Noise increases during the spring break period | 38 | 37 | 7 | 15 | 3 | 2.08 | 1.34 |
| 18. Litter increases during the spring break period | 37 | 25 | 12 | 17 | 9 | 2.36 | 1.86 |
| 19. Spring break disrupts the tranquility of the locality during the period | 13 | 26 | 10 | 31 | 20 | 3.18 | 1.87 |
| 20. Spring break affects morality and local community values | 10 | 11 | 21 | 34 | 24 | 3.53 | 1.53 |
| 21. The behaviour of springbreakers is a good example for the local community | 2 | 9 | 21 | 33 | 35 | 3.90 | 1.08 |
| 22. The consumption of alcohol and drugs should be regulated | 41 | 42 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 1.83 | 0.81 |
| 23. I feel pride for living in a destination popular among springbreakers | 47 | 30 | 12 | 9 | 2 | 1.89 | 1.11 |
| 24. I support to increase the number of springbreakers in Acapulco | 55 | 36 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1.58 | 0.61 |
| 25. I try to avoid contact with spring breakers | 4 | 2 | 19 | 39 | 36 | 4.00 | 1.00 |
| 26. Any sexual manifestation of springbreakers is acceptable for me | 6 | 8 | 18 | 23 | 45 | 3.93 | 1.51 |
| 27. The behaviour of spring breakers in Acapulco is acceptable | 32 | 39 | 15 | 4 | 10 | 2.21 | 1.47 |
| 28. The behaviour of spring breakers in Acapulco is moral | 14 | 25 | 21 | 13 | 27 | 3.13 | 2.00 |
| 29. The behaviour of spring breakers in Acapulco is respectful | 48 | 21 | 15 | 6 | 10 | 2.10 | 1.77 |
| 30. Overall the benefits of springbreakers overpass their disadvantages | 29 | 36 | 15 | 18 | 2 | 2.28 | 1.28 |

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=totally disagree, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Unlike previous studies, nonetheless, this research revealed that spring break does not have a significant impact on local infrastructures ($M=3.5$), local traditions ($M=3.0$), local food ($M=3.1$) and cultural exchange ($M=2.9$). In Rátz's (2000) study, for example, one of the perceived positive effects of tourism development as a whole was the opportunity to meet new people as well as to learn about other countries and languages. Similarly, the evidence provided by Deitch (1989) on the impacts of tourism on the handicrafts in Southeast USA shows that tourism has revitalised the production of handicrafts, enhancing native identity. This study revealed however that spring break impacts are not related to these sociocultural aspects of the destination.

Bearing this in mind, the perceived culture-related benefits of spring break are limited. Although the increase of the sale of handicrafts and souvenirs may be an exception, fieldwork observations and informal conversations suggest that local people perceive this benefit in terms of souvenirs rather than handicrafts. Thus, the benefits seem to belong more to an economic factor (the sale of souvenirs) rather than to the revitalisation and preservation of local handicrafts. Therefore, the benefits of spring break appear to be widely recognised in terms of its economic dimension, as any type of tourism commonly is.

With regard to spring break's costs, five indicators were mostly perceived (see Table 2). There was a general feeling among residents that crowding (87%), alcohol consumption (78%), noise (75%), litter (62%), drug consumption (55%) and local prices (52%) increase as a consequence of the spring break phenomenon in Acapulco. Crowding, noise, litter and the increase of price of goods and services have been previously reported as a consequence of tourism; studies such as that of Andereck et al. (2005), Gu and Wong (2006), and Andriotis and Vaughan (2003) are examples of this. With regard to the increase of alcohol and drug consumption, some studies have also reported them as impacts of tourism; however the frequency and intensity of residents' perception have been lower than those in the present study (see for example Andereck, et al., 2005; Tosun, 2002). This difference is presumed to be closely related to the high levels of drug use and alcohol consumption that have often characterised spring breakers. On the other hand, the spring break is not related to other social costs such as crime (62%), morality and social values (58%), and prostitution (48%). This differs from the findings of other studies on tourism in general. Spanou (2007), for example, argues that tourism has increased the levels of crime and prostitution, and it has affected the life style, social behaviour and local moral values of residents in Cyprus.

In this context, the perceived costs of spring break appear to be intrinsically linked to the hedonistic behaviour of young tourists. As mentioned above, a large amount of spring breaker travel is motivated by the consumption of alcohol, use of drugs and by the party reputation of destinations. It is thus hypothesised that the five most perceived costs (crowding, alcohol, noise, litter and drugs) are connected to the activities and behaviour of spring breakers in this particular destination.

On a related issue, it should be noted that the increase of prostitution is not related to spring break. This may be explained by the fact that spring break sexual activity commonly takes place among students themselves voluntarily and with no financial exchange (Monterrubio & Equihua, 2011). In this way, prostitution can be an existent phenomenon in the destination but rarely consumed by spring breakers. This can help to explain why the increase of prostitution may not be regarded as a social impact of spring break, unlike perhaps other types of tourism.

Finally, with regard to the affective and conative components, the study revealed that while 77% percent of informants feel proud for living in a spring break destination, many residents (68%) do not accept any sexual manifestation of spring breakers nor do they believe that their behaviour is a good example for the community (68%) (see Table 2). Furthermore, it was found that whether spring breakers' behaviour is moral (39% agreed; 40% disagreed), it is largely considered respectful (69%) and therefore acceptable (71%). Perhaps based on the large perception that overall the benefits of spring break overpass their disadvantages (65%), it may be explained why a large number of residents (75%) do not avoid contact with spring breakers and the vast majority (94%) supports to increase the number of spring breakers in the destination.

Clusters description

Based on cluster analysis, three main groups were identified in terms of spring break's perceived impacts and their attitudes towards the phenomenon and tourists' behaviours (see Table 3). Each cluster is described in the following subsections.

Table: 3 Mean scores of clusters

| Statement | 1 | 2 | 3 | F Ratio | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|---------|------|
| 1. Employment increases due to spring breakers | 1.56 | 2.43 | 1.67 | 14.402 | .000 |
| 2. Spring break economic benefit is just for some people | 3.10 | 2.05 | 1.86 | 14.978 | .000 |
| 3. Springbreak favours local economy in low season | 1.32 | 3.28 | 1.67 | 74.755 | .000 |
| 4. Springbreaks increases local trade opportunities | 1.37 | 3.05 | 1.61 | 57.125 | .000 |
| 5. Springbreak has improved public services | 2.51 | 4.05 | 3.71 | 28.176 | .000 |
| 6. Spring break favours tourism promotion of Acapulco | 1.22 | 2.22 | 1.49 | 15.171 | .000 |
| 7. Springbreak enhances local traditions of Acapulco | 2.29 | 4.18 | 2.25 | 71.581 | .000 |
| 8. Springbreak helps to preserve typical food | 2.29 | 4.08 | 2.57 | 59.409 | .000 |
| 9. Springbreak benefits the sale of handcrafts | 1.49 | 3.29 | 2.25 | 36.042 | .000 |
| 10. Springbreak enhances cultural exchange with locals | 2.29 | 3.51 | 2.55 | 15.089 | .000 |
| 11. The price of goods and services increases during spring break period | 2.49 | 3.18 | 2.14 | 10.174 | .000 |
| 12. Alcohol consumption increases in the community during spring break period | 2.17 | 2.20 | 1.41 | 7.756 | .001 |
| 13. Crime increases in the community during spring break period | 4.02 | 3.23 | 3.39 | 6.620 | .002 |
| 14. Prostitution increases in the community during spring break season | 3.85 | 3.08 | 2.71 | 9.834 | .000 |
| 15. Sale and use of drugs increase in the community during spring break period | 3.15 | 2.18 | 2.18 | 9.777 | .000 |
| 16. Spring break increases the number of people in public spaces | 1.51 | 2.08 | 1.61 | 5.894 | .003 |
| 17. Noise increases during the spring break period | 2.56 | 2.22 | 1.53 | 10.950 | .000 |
| 18. Litter increases during the spring break period | 3.29 | 2.37 | 1.61 | 22.004 | .000 |
| 19. Spring break disrupts the tranquility of the locality during the period | 4.05 | 3.23 | 2.43 | 19.816 | .000 |
| 20. Spring break affects morality and local community values | 4.32 | 3.28 | 3.22 | 13.027 | .000 |
| 21. The behaviour of spring breakers is a good example for the local community | 3.44 | 4.43 | 3.61 | 17.481 | .000 |
| 22. The consumption of alcohol and drugs should be regulated | 2.12 | 1.83 | 1.61 | 3.802 | .024 |
| 23. I feel pride for living in a destination popular among springbreakers | 1.27 | 2.52 | 1.57 | 28.645 | .000 |
| 24. I support to increase the number of springbreakers in Acapulco | 1.22 | 1.95 | 1.39 | 15.596 | .000 |
| 25. I try to avoid contact with spring breakers | 4.34 | 3.75 | 4.04 | 4.602 | .011 |
| 26. Any sexual manifestation of springbreakers is acceptable for me | 4.46 | 4.28 | 3.06 | 25.170 | .000 |
| 27. The behaviour of spring breakers in Acapulco is acceptable | 1.51 | 2.71 | 2.14 | 14.442 | .000 |
| 28. The behaviour of spring breakers in Acapulco is moral | 1.93 | 3.75 | 3.29 | 29.124 | .000 |
| 29. The behaviour of spring breakers in Acapulco is respectful | 1.24 | 2.17 | 2.69 | 16.054 | .000 |
| 30. Overall the benefits of springbreakers overpass their disadvantages | 1.66 | 2.98 | 1.88 | 30.141 | .000 |

Cluster 1: Springbreak Supporters. The first cluster represented 26.1% of the sample (n=41). In general terms this cluster represents the most supportive segment of residents towards spring break. They largely recognise that spring break brings several benefits to the community. Higher in priority were that spring break generates employment and increases trade opportunities in the locality; it is thus not surprising to find out that this group perceives that spring break favours Acapulco's economy during low season. Furthermore, they are also the most firmly persuaded group that some local cultural components are also benefited from tourism; they agree that spring break has a positive effect on local traditions, preservation of typical food, the sale of handcrafts and enhancement of cultural exchange with local residents.

Additionally, *spring break supporters* include residents who perceive the least negative aspects of the spring break. In particular, these residents disagree more compared to the other clusters with the idea that spring break increases crime and prostitution, disrupts local tranquillity and affects local morality and values. They are uncertain about spring break causing noise, litter and price increase of local services and goods.

Finally, this segment reported the most positive view and attitudes towards spring break behaviours. For these residents, unlike those belonging to the other two groups, spring breakers' behaviour is acceptable, moral and respectful. Of the three clusters, residents in this group are the most strongly convinced that spring breakers' benefits overpass costs.

Cluster 2: Springbreak Ambivalents. The second cluster is highly recognised by holding uncertain views and attitudes about spring break's benefits and costs. This group is the largest comprising 41.4% of the total sample (n=65). The people in this cluster are uncertain about most of the spring break's benefits; they tend to hold ambivalent views about spring breakers causing employment and favouring local economy. They are also uncertain about spring break benefiting the sale of handcrafts and enhancing cultural exchange in the locality.

Residents in this second group are ambivalent not only about the spring break's benefits but also about its disadvantages. Out of the ten negative impact statements, six were reported as uncertain in this group. Particularly they show ambivalent perceptions towards increase in prostitution and crime and rise of price of goods and services as a consequence of the spring break phenomenon in their locality. Neither do they agree nor do they disagree that spring break increases litter, disrupts local tranquility and affects local morality.

Although they hold conflicting views with regard to spring break's benefits overpassing costs, residents in this group hold positive attitudes supporting the increase of spring breakers in the destination.

Cluster 3: Springbreak Realistics. This cluster contained 32.5% of the sample (n=51). It comprises residents who recognise spring break's benefits but are also aware of the negative impacts; i.e. *realistic* residents acknowledge both benefits and costs almost equally. These people agree with seven out of ten positive outcomes of spring break. Although not as strongly as *supporters*, the *realistics* perceive that spring break is responsible for employment increase, local trade opportunities and tourism promotion. Although they claim that spring break favours local economy in low season, they also argue that the economic benefits are just for some people.

Unlike, the two first clusters, this group acknowledges specific costs of spring break and shows uncertainty about other disadvantages. People in this segment perceive that local prices increase during the season and that alcohol consumption, noise and litter increase during the spring break season. Like those in the *ambivalent* group, people in this cluster also agree that the sale and use of drugs increase in the community during the period.

In general, the *realistics* also recognise, though not as much as *supporters*, that spring break's benefits overpass its disadvantages in the destination. They also tend to be ambivalent in viewing spring breaker's behaviour as acceptable and moral but do regard it as disrespectful.

CONCLUSION

The social representations theory has been adopted in previous tourism studies, especially in the study of local attitudes towards and perceptions of tourism development. However, it is noted that the potential value for understanding in particular local attitudes towards specific types of tourism has not been evidenced. The main contribution of this study therefore lies in the fact that, unlike the great majority of investigations on tourism impacts and attitudes, it offers empirical evidence to confirm the usefulness of social representations theory in explaining residents' attitudes towards the impacts of a very specific type of tourists, the spring breakers, who has 'excessive' behaviours. Among the main findings of this study it was evident that Acapulco residents were not homogenous as far as their attitudes towards spring breakers are concerned. While the heterogeneity of local populations in terms of their attitudes towards tourism has been recognised in previous research (e.g. Davies et al., 1988; Madrigal, 1995; Weaver & Lawton, 2001; Ribeiro et al., 2013), this study offers empirical evidence to suggest that the difference in local attitudes may be considerably shaped by tourists' overt behaviours and their perceived implications.

Social representations are regarded as important properties of groups; what makes a group is a shared set of beliefs among its members (Pearce et al., 1996). The results of this research indicate that such representations exist in the destination under study and allow segmenting residents within local communities in terms of their ideas, emotions and behaviours towards spring break. Based on perceived tourists' behaviours, residents in spring break destinations may be supportive, ambivalents or realistics regarding the acknowledgement of benefits and costs.

In this vein, it is important to notice that while differences take place among the three clusters, they also share certain representations. All groups perceive that the spring break segment favours the destination's tourism promotion. They also report that alcohol consumption increases in the community during the spring break, though the *realistics* are the ones who agree the most with this assertion. Additionally, it is observed by the three groups that the number of people in public spaces increases as a consequence of spring breakers in Acapulco. Although it is also observed that there is not any single negative consequence of spring break on which the three clusters agree on simultaneously, the three groups agree that the consumption of drugs and alcohol should be regulated. This offers the opportunity for government intervention in terms of regulating tourists' behaviour, which resulted as a very important issue in shaping attitudes. Although there were differences among the three clusters and all groups perceive certain costs, they all supported the increase of the number of spring breakers in Acapulco. However, there was a cluster which held ambivalent views about spring breakers. When tourists are greeted with hostility their number can potentially decline (Andriotis, 2004). Therefore, attempts should be made to increase the number of social benefits and reduce social costs to the broader population. If benefits are extended to all segments of the population, local support towards spring break tourism will likely come as a result. This represents an intervention opportunity not only for the public but also for the private sectors. In the same vein, government intervention should focus on the regulation of students' behaviours. If spring break students are allowed to keep on adopting these and other behaviours, sociocultural friction between tourists and locals may eventually take place. The design and implementation of spring break codes of conduct, for instance, should become part of government strategies for regulating tourists' behaviour.

To conclude, this study is of exploratory nature and did not necessarily pursue the representativeness of its results. Thus, while the adoption of a non-probabilistic criterion for the sample size was mainly justified by the argument that convenience sampling is widely used in the social sciences (Bryman, 2008), and it has proved useful in the study of attitudes and perceptions towards tourism (see for example Ap, Var, & Din, 1991; Teye et al., 2002), it is acknowledged that the sample size of this study is not representative of the whole local population, and therefore the results of this study should not be generalised. Further empirical evidence and the adoption of emic approaches remain an option for future research.

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